

Conspiring to Silence 2022
 Luke 18:31-43 Luke 19:28-40

Luke 18:31-43 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.” But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Luke 19:28-40 (New Revised Standard Version)

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

If you've ever been in my office at the church, you may have noticed
 that there are quite a few books sitting on my shelves.

And the truth is,

I don't necessarily agree with every author of every book.

Reading and studying authors whose thinking differs from mine
 helps sharpen, deepen and clarify my own understandings
 by forcing me to test and reconsider my ideas and beliefs.

It is most unfortunate these days that so many in our culture
 seek to censor and silence opposing voices, ideas and opinions
 rather than discern the truth through open debate & discussion.

Both of the Scripture passages we read today
include people in power trying to limit and silence other voices,
but the truth still comes out ---- truth wins and prevails.

In our first Scripture passage, Jesus explains to his disciples
who he is and what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem,
but the disciples didn't get it, **they just didn't see it.**

The author of Luke often uses irony and contrast to tell the story.

Here, the disciples are passing through Jericho and clueless
while a blind man is able to see that Jesus is the Messiah. vs. 38
he shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

"Son of David" is an Old Testament title for the long promised Messiah-
and it is a truthful declaration about who Jesus Christ really is.

And so how do those around the blind man respond to hearing the truth? vs. 39
Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet.

To the world, this blind man was insignificant, an unworthy nobody,
but it's **the blind man** who perceives the actual identity of Jesus
as he cries out proclaiming that truth and asking for mercy.

And those who do not see or refuse to see, try to silence him...
... which sets the pattern we also see in the Palm Sunday story.

**Luke tells the story about Jesus entering Jerusalem
to help us understand and interpret the events
of the week, the Passion and meaning of Easter.**

The triumphant entry story begins with Jesus and his disciples,
as they're gathered near Bethany, the outskirts of Jerusalem.
Jesus instructs two of the disciples to bring him an unriden colt.

It is noteworthy that in this Luke 19 passage,
much of the focus is on the colt Jesus would ride...
... which is seemingly, just a minor matter of his transportation.

Yet over half of Luke's story about Jesus entering Jerusalem
describes & deals with the details of acquiring the donkey ---

- where to go and find it, what kind of colt to seek,
and instructions about what to do and what to say.

So why do you suppose, there is so much emphasis on the donkey?

It's because details of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey
are described and foretold by the Old Testament prophets...
... making the point that events of Palm Sunday, Holy Week & Easter,
were **all according to the will, plan and saving purpose of God.**

Jesus obviously knows where it is, and what will be said,
telling the disciples to answer, vs. 31 "The Lord needs it"

The particular form of the Greek used here means "it belongs to",
or more literally translated, "its Lord or its owner needs it",

or **“the one to whom it belongs needs and wants it”** ---
-- though nothing in Scripture mentions Jesus purchasing a donkey.

That phrase "The Lord needs it" is really a **theological statement**,
that by right of Creation, everything everywhere including our lives
really belong to our God who made and blesses each one of us,
and who knows us completely **and loves us relentlessly**.

So, "Why are you untying that colt?"

- because the Lord needs it, and it's what the Lord wants...

... and I see that same truth and understanding **active here @ 1st Pres.**

Why do you sing in the choir, play bells, teach or serve at all?

**- because there is a need,
and I believe it's what the Lord wants.**

Why do you help out with Salt and Light or visit with shut-ins?

**- because there is a need,
and I believe it's what the Lord wants.**

Why do you pray for our church, our leaders and for our mission?

**- because there is a need,
and I believe it's what the Lord wants.**

Why give our money, our time & talents, and share in church life?

**- because there is a need,
and I believe it's what the Lord wants.**

The basis for all of it is an obedient response to God's grace & call.

It's not that you or I went out seeking the Lord,
or that we worked to earn or deserve God's grace,
but rather, having experienced God's love, blessings and mercy,
I want to respond, to grow closer, to obey and **enjoy**
this God who loves me and who went looking for me
and who found me even before I knew I was lost.

Because my life, my all is a gift from God and belongs to God,
and so I want whatever God wants, intends and desires for me.

It is God's purpose to bless us, and the Lord has so arranged it,
for our relationship with God to give us joy, meaning and peace,
which happens when we use our gifts, our time, our lives
to glorify God by serving as the Lord shows us needs.

There is also another theological claim imbedded in this passage.

It is, the truth that Jesus was always fully in control.

He was fully aware, knowing in advance all of the details --

- he clearly knew where the colt would be
- he clearly knew what the owners would ask
- he knew the disciples would bring it to him,
- he already knew the crowd would celebrate his coming.

The author of Luke wants to make it very clear,
that just as getting the colt was all according to God's plan,
so too, all the other events of the passion story,
were also on purpose and exactly as God planned...

... indicating, the crucifixion of Jesus was not random or accidental.

It was not a flash crowd suddenly caught up in the moment,
but absolutely deliberate, and exactly as God intended.

The perspective given in the Gospel of Luke and other NT writings,
is that all the way back to the Garden of Eden in the beginning,
and all through the writings of the Old Testament,
and on past the last word of Revelation on into eternity,

**it's all been the working out of God's plan and purpose all along,
to love, bless, save, heal and show gracious mercy to lost sinners.**

This leads to two important truths about our hope in Christ.

First, our God is a God of purpose who plans and fulfills promises.
So when we falter, struggle, suffer, or even face defeat,
we are assured and can trust that God hasn't abandoned us.

Whatever situation we face, God is with us to sustain & bless us,
as we read in Romans 8:28. 39 We know that all things work together for good for those who love
God, who are called according to his purpose... and nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love
of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The **second** hopeful conclusion we can draw from these texts,
is that God's plan and purpose is always
**an expression and sign that demonstrates God's love,
and our assurance of God's desire to grace and bless us.**

Just as God loved, planned, promised and fulfilled way back then,
so God is still at work and still accomplishing grace and good
in our lives, in this church and in the world today, right now.
So we are precisely where and when God placed us to make a difference.

In the next scene of the story, the disciples put Jesus on the colt,
and in celebration the people throw down their cloaks
for it is the coming of the promised king - God's anointed.

It is the pattern of a royal procession coming joyfully into the city
following rituals that announce the peaceful arrival of the king,
the triumphant entry into the king's royal city... vs. 38
"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven"

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
these words are taken from Psalm 118, as in our Call to Worship,
which is a royal psalm that celebrates the coming of the king.

Second part, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven"
familiar words, that point back to the birth of Christ, Luke 2:13-14
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

The author of Luke is saying
we should interpret the Palm Sunday entry much like Christmas,
for both are God's gift to us, God coming to us, to humankind,
and both are ultimately expressions of God's love.

The Pharisees, opposed to Jesus throughout his ministry,
would have liked to restrain & hold back the praise & celebration,

but creation itself is connected and would have cried out
had the disciples been stifled and silenced. vs. 39-40

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

(and the stones crying out is from the prophet Habakkuk 2:11)

The core of this passage is that it's God's purpose and intention

¹ being fulfilled as God planned before the beginning,
² as described by the Hebrew prophets along the way,
³ and that neither the Pharisees, Rome or this world
could or are ever able to hold back the Good News...

... for it is about God's relentless love and continuing call of grace.

So our call and our task for today and for every day we live.
is to be like the shouting followers at the triumphant entry
announcing the glorious coming King and that Jesus is Lord...

**... for we are God's beloved children, precious to our King,
called and equipped to bring that Good News to all the world,
to let the love of God shine through us by how we live.**

Today, for us, as we are moving into Holy Week,
as we are confronted by the terrible, the blood and cruelty
of the inhumane suffering and death that Jesus endured,
let that serve to remind us of the horror of sin and depravity,
and why we need a Savior, God's grace to accomplish what we cannot.

This Luke passage makes it very clear that all those events
were indeed a necessary part of God's plan to save us,
not some random or accidental circumstance.

and

All that Jesus suffered and endured, even betrayal and death,
were to resolve our problem of sin and its consequences,
because God loves us, wants to save us and bless us.

As we move into Holy Week, I ask myself in response to the Good News,
am I really aware and open to God's grace and message to me?
does my life and my living reflect trust and hope
in God's promises & something more than status quo? ...
... because nominal faith is easy, but committed discipleship is not.

So during this week, Holy week look for opportunities
to reach out, and reflect God's love for this world...
... perhaps pray with someone, call on a shut-in, greet a stranger,
refuse to get angry, to express frustration, or take offence...
... and **let God's love and mercy guide our affections, words & actions,
toward a more whole, hopeful and joyful presence in this world.**

**God's gracious purpose, God's love and mercy will triumph
which is our hope & truth that makes all the difference.**

As Isaac Watts wrote his familiar Passion hymn,

*"When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;*

Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all”¹

¹ Isaac Watts, 1674-1748, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, vs. 1, 4.